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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

MEMORANDUM

The Situation in Vietnam

State Dept. review completed

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3 March 1967

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HIGHLIGHTS

Another demonstration against "false peace" was held in Saigon on 3 March. North Vietnamese troops in the highlands of South Vietnam continue to display increased aggressiveness against US forces.

I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam: North Vietnamese Army (NVA) forces in the Pleiku/Kontum/Cambodia tri-border region continue to display increased aggressiveness against US 4th Infantry Division Operation SAM HOUSTON (Paras. 1-3). Communist mortar crews on 2 March shelled a US Marine airstrip near Khe Sanh Special Forces camp in Quang Tri Province, but inflicted only light casualties and damage (Para. 4). Indications continue to be received of a major enemy troop buildup threatening the US/South Vietnamese Special Forces camp at Ba To, in south-central Quang Ngai Province (Paras. 5-7).

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II. Political Developments in South Vietnam: Another public protest against "false peace" was held on 3 March in front of the French Consulate (Paras. 1-3).

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IV. Other Communist Military Developments: There is nothing of significance to report.

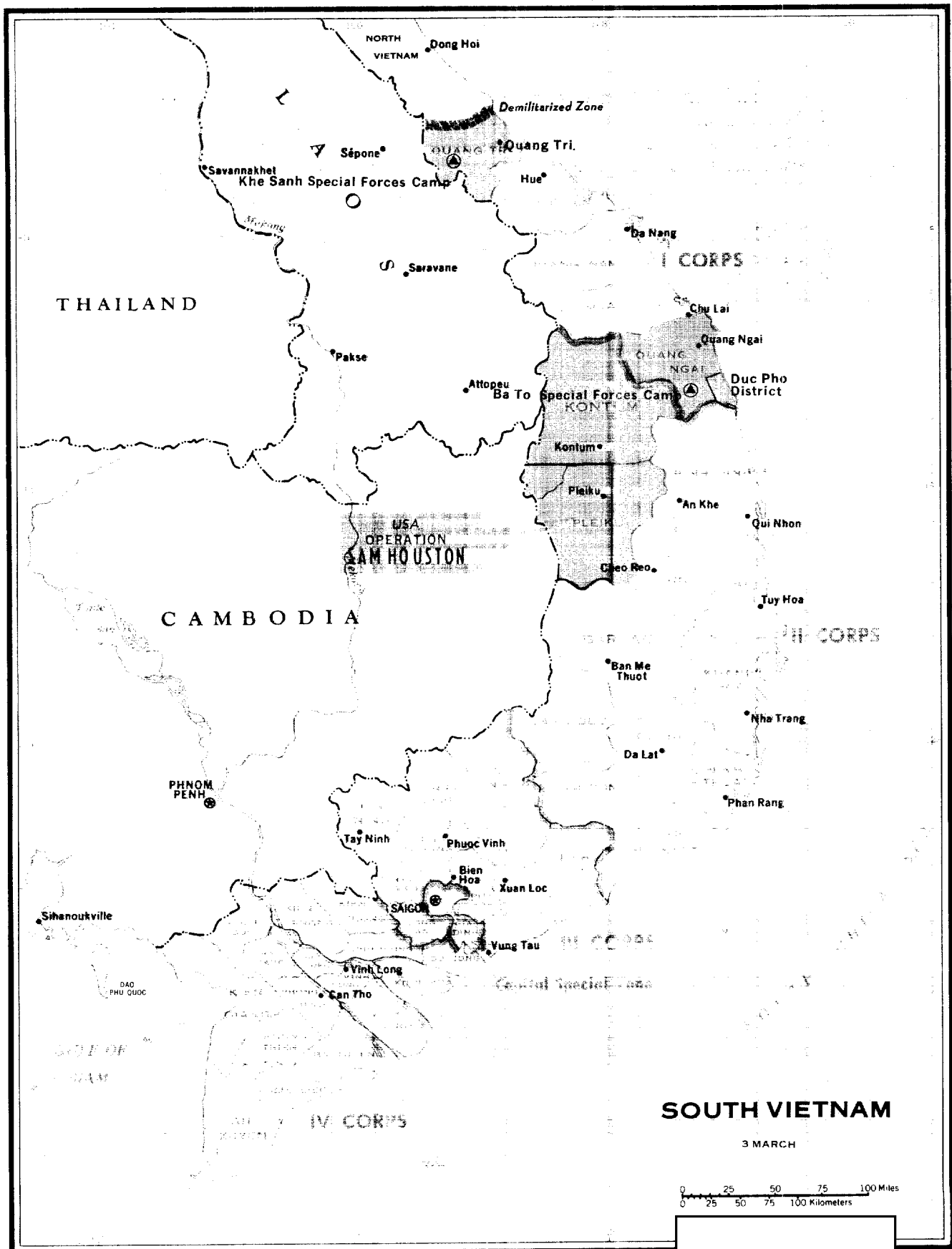
V. Communist Political Developments: Most of the North Vietnamese politburo dropped out of sight for a ten-day period following Tet (Paras. 1-2).

A poster in Peking states that a North Vietnamese delegation was in Peking in February talking over Chinese aid (Para. 3). U Thant and the North Vietnamese consul general in Rangoon met to discuss Vietnam, according to the DRV Consul (Paras. 4-5).

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I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. In two separate attacks on 2 March, the command post of one of six US 4th Infantry Division battalions participating in Cambodian border surveillance Operation SAM HOUSTON in Pleiku and Kontum provinces was shelled by an estimated 90 rounds of mortar fire. US casualties were two killed and 16 wounded. The US countered with artillery fire against the suspected mortar emplacement, but results are unknown.

2. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The sharply intensified NVA harassment and probing campaign against Operation SAM HOUSTON may indicate that preparations for major enemy offensive action in the highlands are reaching their final stages. On the other hand, this Communist activity is almost certainly a reflection of increasing Communist sensitivity to continuing allied incursions into or near their Cambodian border redoubts. Heightened Communist resistance in recent days could also represent a determined attempt to divert attention from a suspected resupply and infiltration effort in the Pleiku/Kontum/Cambodia tri-border region.

3. In Quang Tri Province, Communist forces on 2 March placed mortar fire on a US Marine forward airstrip at Khe Sanh, 30 miles south-southwest of Quang Tri city near the Laos border. Two marines were killed and eight wounded. In addition, one helicopter was destroyed and one damaged although the airfield itself sustained minimal damage and remains operational. There is no evidence that any mortar rounds were directed against the nearby Special Forces camp at Khe Sanh, although this installation has been subjected to intensified enemy reconnaissance operations. [REDACTED]

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Major Communist Threat in Quang Ngai

4. There are continuing indications of a major Communist troop buildup near the US/South Vietnamese Special Forces camp at Ba To, in south-central Quang Ngai Province.

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Approximately 750 South Vietnamese CIDG/Popular Forces personnel, together with a small contingent of US advisers, are garrisoned at Ba To.

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5.

have continually alluded to plans for a major "Quang Ngai Campaign" by the 2nd and 3rd NVA divisions during the spring-summer period of 1967.

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enemy plans called for diversionary attacks by the 2nd NVA Division in the northern and central portion of the province in coordination with a major 3rd NVA Division offensive in the Duc Pho district of southeastern Quang Ngai.

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6. Since 1 February, however, a series of allied spoiling operations in the northern and southern coastal areas of Quang Ngai Province have inflicted losses in excess of 1,000 killed on enemy main force units which traditionally operate in these locales. Although these operations have clearly reduced the combat effectiveness of several of the regimental formations identified in the current Ba To buildup the enemy threat to the allied base nonetheless remains substantial.

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II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Another apparently GVN-inspired youth demonstration against foreign peace initiatives occurred in Saigon on 3 March, although its size and orderliness suggested official efforts to impose restraint. Only two days earlier, Premier Ky had assured Ambassador Lodge that he would try to put a stop to such demonstrations. [REDACTED]

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2. Politically sophisticated Vietnamese sources have told the US Embassy that the government's obviously fabricated story of a "coalition" government-in-exile was part of a scenario to justify the launching of antipeace and anti-French demonstrations. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] the reasoning behind the affair was threefold. First, the government felt it had to counter a growing tendency among the Vietnamese people to believe that a negotiated settlement and a coalition government was imminent. Second, the GVN wanted to commit popular opinion to its own negative position concerning the issue of negotiations with the Communists. Third, the source said the GVN hoped to create a climate for a possible purge of some political undesirables with neutralist or pro-French tendencies, including the Buddhist militants in Saigon should they become publicly active again.

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3. [REDACTED] indicated that some groups of Vietnamese would believe the story of the alleged coalition government-in-exile despite its being purely a government propaganda ploy. On 3 March, the Constituent Assembly adopted a resolution opposing unjust peace movements, although it is likely that the assembly was well aware of the government's work behind the scenes to capitalize on public protests.

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IV. OTHER COMMUNIST MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. There is nothing of significance to report.

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V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. For a ten-day period following the Tet holiday, almost the entire North Vietnamese politburo dropped from public view. Although such public inactivity is not unprecedented, it has frequently in the past been an indicator of a high-level party meeting. Of the 11 politburo members, only Defense Minister Giap and Foreign Minister Nguyen Duy Trinh are known to have appeared in public from 14-24 February.

2. The politburo in general appears to have been relatively inactive throughout the entire month of February. The only known out-of-country trip which might have occupied any one of these individuals was a visit to Peking by an unidentified high-level delegation from 11 to 18 February. Only Ho Chi Minh and Vo Nguyen Giap among the politburo members are known to have made public appearances in Hanoi during that seven-day period.

3. A poster seen in Peking dated 24 February reported a speech made by Chou En-lai on 17 February in which he stated that "Li Hsien-nien (Chinese minister of finance) has just finished talking to Vietnamese comrades about Chinese aid to Vietnam."

U Thant and North Vietnamese in Rangoon

4. According to Western press reports, the North Vietnamese consul general in Rangoon has said that he met with UN Secretary General Thant "to discuss the Vietnamese problem" during the latter's visit to Burma. The consul did not elaborate on the content of the conversation.

5. Col. Ha Van Lau, the DRV's chief representative to the International Control Commission, has been in Rangoon for the past week. He reportedly left for Phnom Penh on 3 March. Col. Lau is one of North Vietnam's chief spokesmen on the war and as such may well have taken the lead in explaining to Thant the DRV's position.

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